Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The Rudy Maxa Show STATION WRC Radio

DATE July 7, 1984 9:05 A.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Serpent on the Hill/Rhodes

RUDY MAXA: This hour we're going to talk with a gentleman named Richard Rhodes (?). He's a former CIA agent who, after he retired, decided to write a novel about a CIA agent. His novel is called Serpent on the Hill.

Well, the CIA didn't think that was such a great idea. And it took a little bit of jumping through hoops on the part of Richard Rose to exercise his imagination.

We're going to talk with him this hour about not only his novel, but also the right he had -- or the route he had to take to have the right to publish it.

* * *

MAXA: We have to get one thing resolved right here at the top. We're talking with Richard Rhodes, but the pen name for his novel -- his book is called Serpent on the Hill -- is Philip Elliott.

How would you like to be referred to this hour, Mr. Elliott-Rhodes.

PHILIP RHODES: It's probably easier to stick with Philip, otherwise it confuses people with the identity of the book.

MAXA: All right. To sell books, we'll call you Philip Elliott.

Philip Elliott has written a new book. It's called Serpent on the Hill. It's a hardback. And it's published by,

Material supplied Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2 d or exhibited.

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Dallas Publishing Company, or Dallas Publishing, Incorporated. And it's a novel. And the hero -- well, there are several main characters, but a couple of them -- one of them is a lady CIA agent who tracks a U.S. Senator who's suspected of being a Soviet spy. Spy novels are written every day, but they're not written every day by an ex-CIA agent.

Maybe you better tell us a little about your background first, Mr. Elliott.

RHODES: Well, I was -- I'll go back to the very beginning of my career, because I think it's important to flesh it out. And I won't take an hour.

I was a Marine after I graduated from high school, and I got involved in electronics in the Marine Corps for three years. I left there. I went to college, where I went to law school. Then I went into the Treasury Department as a criminal investigator. And strangely enough, I graduated into electronics again, where I was doing wiretapping and bugging and that sort of thing at the Treasury Department. Then I was recruited into the CIA, or I recruited myself into the CIA, and continued to work in the clandestine technical operations field until I left there in 1970.

MAXA: Were you stationed abroad?

RHODES: Yes, sir, almost all the time, except for when you're at headquarters. But I certainly had no domestic assignment, as such.

MAXA: What parts of the world were you in?

RHODES: I was in the Middle East. I was in Europe. I was in South America some.

MAXA: Okay. And you were with the agency, then, how long?

RHODES: Eight years.

MAXA: And retired in?

RHODES: 1970.

MAXA: Okay.

Now, when did you being to write -- well, when did you -- this is your first novel, I presume.

RHODES: That's right. I had been writing -- once I got

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

out of the agency, I was somewhat adrift, and one of the things I decided to do was write on physical security matters, because I knew a great deal about that over the years. And I got associated with lock and burglar alarm companies in an executive capacity and began to write those kinds of things and became fairly well-known for that. And then one day I decided that I had an urge to write a novel, and I went back to school and took some courses. And that's how it all started.

MAXA: Now, at some point you knew you had to clear your writings with the CIA. Is that right?

RHODES: That's right. I had forgotten anything about it because it had been so long ago. It had been over -- well, it had been 20-some years, almost, since I had entered, and I didn't remember exactly what the caveats were. So I wrote a letter to the CIA and said, "I'm writing a novel. What do I do now, folks?"

MAXA: And they told you?

RHODES: They said, very simply, "Send it to us, under your contract obligation not to write anything unless it's subjected to the prepublication review committee."

MAXA: When we think of people who have trouble with the CIA in clearning novels or books, we think of Victor Marchetti and John Marks and Philip Agee, and basically people whose writings have taken a critical stance against the agency. Was hat on your mind at all when you started writing your novel?

RHODES: No. As a matter of fact, I figured that it would go through in very short order because, number one, the plot was entirely concocted. It was not a diguised CIA operation. It didn't even attempt to identify anyone cleverly in Washington. My senator in the book, who is alleged to be a Russian spy, was never described in the book, for apparent reasons. I wanted everyone to use their imagination. I had no intention of naming any places where I had worked on operations or naming any specific equipment. And so I thought, "This is going to be a piece of cake."

MAXA: Okay. What happened?

RHODES: Well, I submitted the manuscript and I got a letter and a couple of follow-up phone calls which said there were several problems, and they couldn't talk about them over the phone, and would I please come to Washington.

So I asked them if -- and I'm living in Dallas, Texas, and was at the time I wrote the book. I asked them if that was

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

something that they could pick up the tab for, because they had a lot of money and I had very little. And of course they declined.

So I flew to Washington at my own expense and went out to Langley and had a meeting with two people who represented themselves as being representatives of the prepublication review board.

MAXA: Now, from the beginning, was it a hostile kind of meeting?

RHODES: No, it was quite friendly. As a matter of fact, I'll be very honest with you, one of the people who showed up at the meeting is a man that was probably one of my five or ten or 15 best friends in the agency when I was there.

MAXA: All right. And did they have some real serious concrete problems that you hadn't considered in your writing?

RHODES: And I don't think -- and this is too touch back on it again. I don't think they sent him to the meeting so that it would be a cordial meeting. They sent him because they thought he was knowledgeable in the areas in which I was writing. And of course there was an attorney there who represented the prepublication review board from the legal standpoint.

We discussed a number of points early in the meeting. There were some single words. They said, "Well, let's dispense with these," and they had their manuscript which had been marked up. And they said, "Let's talk about things like" -- and now the famous word which I'm a little tired of talking about, but it's so ludicrous and it's caught the attention of many, many people -- the word chip, c-h-i-p, which is, of course, an integrated circuit, in the dictionary and in anybody's language.

MAXA: The CIA objected to your use of the word chip?

RHODES: Yes. And that was early in the discussion. And I began to get a sinking feeling because I said, "What in the world could you possibly object to that word about?" And they told me. And I'm not going to get on here and tell you that whole discussion, other than my answer to them was, "I don't care in what context you think it's sensitive, it's a generic word. And anyone reading this book could not possibly make any intelligence connection. There's just no way in the world."

And I thought, "Ahh, I've won that point."

They just looked at me and said, "Well, we want you to take it out."

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

And I said, "Well, if this is the way it's going to go, it looks like we're going to have a long morning."

I believe that's a pretty close paraphrase of my first few minutes in there.

MAXA: And was it a long morning?

RHODES: It was only about three hours, because I basically argued a few of my points and gave in, because I didn't have a very strong bargaining position. I didn't realize how serious they were about all these points. I thought that I might be able to talk them out of them, so I had not come with an attorney. Of course, he would have had to have been cleared for top secret and I would have had to pay him, which I had no money for at that time. So I was in there winging it by myself, thinking that I was going to deal with it, straighten all this out, and get on back and get the book to press.

MAXA: Reasonable people sitting down and having a reasonable conversation.

RHODES: Sure. Because I went through my background for a reason, Rudy. I'd been a Marine. I'd been a Treasury agent. I'd been an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency who had served honorably and well and had always exercised good judgment. I could tell you some of the things that have happened where they had sent me places and said, "We're sending you because you're the only guy in this division who'll be able to survive, because you'll use good judgment."

Here I am in this room and I'm being told that I'm exercising extremely poor judgment and that I don't understand the situation, and that the whole world is going to assume that everything I say is true. And even though it might be totally fabricated, I need to take certain things out.

So I was pretty stunned.

MAXA: We'll be back with Philip Elliott in just a moment. We're talking about the prepublication review the CIA conducted of his novel Serpent on the Hill, conducted because he had been an agent with the CIA and had signed a piece of paper saying that he couldn't write anything without previous clearance. We'll go a little deeper into that subject in just a moment.

* * *

MAXA: On the WRC Live Line, it's Philip Elliott, author of a new book called Serpent on the Hill, former CIA agent.

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

The novel's -- is it proper to say the novel's heroine is a lady CIA agent?

RHODES: Oh, yes. And that's part of the charm of it. And that's gotten a very good response. There's never been, as far as I know, a lady CIA agent in fiction that's this kind of a gal. She's pretty resourceful. And the ladies love her, and the men lover her too.

MAXA: Are there women in the CIA who are that sort of heroines?

RHODES: There were a number of people, a number of ladies working in the field that I admired. And I was asked this question earlier in the week, and I had to reflect upon it. And really, with all the technical marvels that the Defense Intelligence and the CIA and everybody have at their command, it's still a people-to-people business. And women are very, very sensitive to nuances in personal relationships, and I think they make outstanding intelligence agents.

MAXA: All right. And so we have Philip Elliott sitting in suburban Virginia with the CIA, and they've already objected to the use of the word chip, and you know it's going to be a long meeting.

Did they object to twists in the plot, to modus operandi that might have been used by agents? Or was it just words and sentences? I mean blocks of words.

RHODES: Well, there were basically two thrust, Rudy. One of them was single words. And, of course, the other one that's been published, and I think James Kilpatrick and other people who have commented on this in newspaper articles and other places have mentioned "The Farm." They asked me to take that out. And I was incredulous because even in 1982, or whenever it was I was up there for the review, "The Farm" was a household word.

MAXA: Sure.

RHODES: ...there's a book recently came out which I wrote a little review on for some people in Congress just to point out the hypocrisy in this business, and the author says there, "The Farm at Camp Peary, Virgina." Well, I don't know whether it's at Camp Peary. I'm not going to comment on that. But this is the kind of ludicrousness that began to dawn on me.

The other thing was that because I had an extremely long background in electronics -- from the time I was 12 years old, I had been involved in electronics. I'd been an amateur radio

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

operator since 1949, Rudy, among other things. I had in my briefcase, when I was there at the agency, one of my handy talkers that I used on two meters. And I had patterned a device after that and I had patterned some other devices after common, commercially-available pieces of equipment. And therein were some more problems, the idea that I might be giving away some technologies that existed in the agency.

MAXA: Now, you were not a severe case, were you?

RHODES: No, I didn't think so. And I had spent a great deal of time in self-censorship because I knew that there would be these kinds of questions arise. And so I had gone to extremes, I thought, to try to disguise anything that I did know, so that this thing would be totally made-up.

One of the things that dawned on me about a third of the way through the meeting was I had been gone about 13 years when I'd finished this novel. I'd been working on it for seven years. And I have never been in touch with anybody from the agency, and particularly the technical division or the R&D division. So I knew nothing about what was going on. But I do read a lot and I subscribe to a lot of technical magazines.

So I looked at them, and they told me I had to change a system that I had invented. I won't get into the details. And I said, "Do you mean that if I make something up and you think that it's not something I should be writing about, then I can't write about it? Whether I have any personal knowledge, whether I have ever been privy to this information?"

They said, "That's sort of the way it is."

MAXA: You mean you just made up...

RHODES: "Is it you're censoring may imagination?" And I just stared at them.

And I really never intended to make a big case out of all this. I just sort of intended to go on about my business and see if I couldn't get any book going and see what happened.

And then the President came out with his National Security Directive 84. And I wrote a letter to Publishers Weekly, and just a snowballing series of events happened after that.

MAXA: Now, what's the President's National Security Directive?

RHODES: Well, the one that he promulgated in 1983, actually called National Security Directrive 84, in which he

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

proposed to put 127,000 or more government employees, outside the CIA and NSA, under this same kind of censorship, and also polygraph examination, that the CIA and the NSA enjoy. And I think you, living in Washington, know that there was a tremendous furor over that.

MAXA: Uh-huh.

RHODES: ..columnists -- Bill Safire, Anthony Lewis, Kilpatrick, editorial boards, and people writing letters to the White House, Carl Rowan writing an article saying, in Reader's Digest, "Mr. President, this is not Russia." A pretty sensitive issue.

And about this time, I wrote a letter to Publishers Weekly saying, "Gee, it bothered me too. Because if I'm writing a novel that's totall made-up and I'm censored in this way, extend that That came out. Then Gannett News Services called me.

All of this has been people calling me. I wasn't going around trying to make a big case that I had been abused. I was going to just wing that on my own.

MAXA: Have you heard from anyone in the agency since you came to terms on the book?

RHODES: I got -- of course I got a letter saying that they had approved the manuscript. The whole process took about six months because I was going back and forth with them, discussing things. And then I had to rewrite portions of about 50 pages. I had to rewrite one section that required references in about 50 different places. So I came back to Dallas and rewrote the thing along the lines they had requested. And of course the briefing was so thorough that when I sent them my revised manuscript, there was not a single objection to it.

MAXA: All right, let's throw this out for general discussion. Here we have an ex-CIA agent who decides to write a novel, makes up stuff, besides the plot, besides the characters, makes up a system; and the CIA objects. Does it bother anybody? Does it bother you? Is there some huge reason that Philip Elliott might be missing, in his objection to what he calls nitpicking a novel? He calls it that in a Society of

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Professional Journalists' piece he wrote in which -- I like your line, "The CIA has no proprietary right to the law of physics."

RHODES: Well, I've given this a tremendous amount of thought. And of course it's gone way beyond my story. I'm not concerned anymore about myself. I can take care of myself. I can write something else, or I can go into another line of business, if it bothers them all that much. It's not that big an issue. But it's what it means to hundreds of thousands of other people. It's sort of like the tip of the iceberg that you take an extension of: If they do this to a person who's making things up, goodness gracious, what's going to happen to the rest?

And as you probably know, there's even a bill in the Congress now, H.R. 4681, introduced by Jack Brooks, which would prohibit the Administration from promulgating any more censorship or polygraph rules for anyone outside of NSA and CIA, just flat prohibition against it. And I stay pretty close in touch with some people in Washington, and I think there's a reasonably good chance that that'll pass in some form this session.

MAXA: Good morning. You're on WRC with Philip Elliott.

MAN: I think what the CIA doing is perfectly legitimate. They have to keep a control on the officials and agents who have worked for them. Using your pure imagination was also gotten from your experiences in the Central Intelligence Agency.

RHODES: I don't have any quarrel with the fact that they have to do something. As a matter of fact, I've been writing some very strong statements that I think the law needs to be beefed up, if you can believe that. I think that it needs tobe changed.

Let me just go back to the experience factor. I'm 52 years old. When I wrote the book I was in my forties. I have been involved in electronics since I was 12 years old. I had eight years experience with the agency. So I tried to make the point, and I continue to make the point, that I have a tremendous wealth of information from my whole life about electronics, criminal investigation, and those sorts of things. And so somewhere in there, I think, there's an inequity that's never been resolved.

What I'm saying now, in all the things that I write and all the conversations that I get involved in on the radio, is that I think that there ought to be some kind of a broad-based law that's based on criminal statute that would encompass anybody who writes about intelligence matters. And I'm willing to go under it. I'm willing to give up this contract, which really is

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

kind of a toothless tiger, in many respects, to go under a criminal law that would also include people who write books like the one I just cited, who have never been in the CIA, who have good sources inside CIA and who write things that are much more revealing than I've ever written or ever will write. There are just many, many books that curl my hair when I read them. And there are many columnists that come out and say, "Based on top secret documents which I have had access to." That's wrong, in my opinion.

So, I don't have a basic disagreement with the idea. I'm disagreeing with prior restraint and with the exaggerated and overzealous way in which case of fiction was handled.

MAXA: Okay, caller?

MAN: Okay. Thank you.

MAXA: Hi. You're on WRC with Phil Elliott.

WOMAN: I would just like to know how anyone in your position can be absolutely sure that you...

RHODES: Could you speak up a little bit, ma'am?

WOMAN: Yes. I would just like to know how anyone in your position could be absolutely sure that you can be just objective about it, having privy to such secret information and everything. How can you be absolutely sure that you're not drawing on some kind of secret information in the back of your memory bank?

RHODES: That's a very good question. And we had long discussions about that during the course of the time I was up there.

One of the things that happened as a result of my discussion with them was that I sat down after I came back to Dallas and I took out some things that they had not asked me to take out because I heard the kind of thing you're saying and I felt an obligation, because, as I say, I'm a patriot, not somebody who's trying to destroy the agency. But on the other hand, I had a number of people who had high clearances who looked at some of this stuff and they sort of got me going on this, saying, "Well, this is ridiculous."

So, I don't disagree with the point that somewhere in my subconscious there may be some things. And what I'm suggesting, and I wrote in "Freedom of Information" for Gannett a rather long article, I'm suggesting that the Congress quit avoiding its responsibility and pass a criminal statute that would relate to

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2

everyone who writes about national security. But I'm further suggesting that there be pre-publication review boards in each of these sensitive agencies that would take a manuscript in, look it over, call the writer in, if he so chose or she chose, and say, "Here are some sensitive areas. We'd like you to avoid them." And then if the writer refuses to avoid them, they have an option to indict them criminally.

And I don't get anybody in Washington -- and I'm corresponding with a tremendous number of people. I don't get anybody who argues with that. They just say, "It's probably not going to happen. We've just got to try to hold the line where we are this session. And if 4681 goes through, that'll be a minor miracle in itself."

(End of transcript due to technical difficulties)

Approved For Release 2008/09/19 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201300002-2